

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION MEETING

APPROVED

Minutes Tuesday, February 23, 2021
(Meeting Rescheduled due to weather)

Meeting occurred via WebEx Teleconferencing

Chair Scott Markow called meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

Commissioners Present: Scott Markow, (Chair), Bianca Chang (Vice Chair), Joshua Kaufman (Corresponding Secretary), Mabrooka Chaudhry, Lynda Earle, Bob Ford, Joan Hash, Peter Hwang, Joshua Kaufmann, Gabriel Terrasa, Kui Zhao and Jonathon Di Pietro (Student Commissioner)

Absent: Leslie Salgado- Tamayo (Commissioner) and Yolanda F. Sonnier (Executive Secretary)

Staff Present: Chaunta Taylor (Recording Secretary)

Legal Counsel Present: Melissa Goldmeier

Public Attendees Present: Mr. Keith A. Merkey, Education and Outreach Associate with the Maryland Commission on Civil Rights (MCCR) and Mr. Hiruy Hadgu, a Howard County resident.

I. PUBLIC FORUM

Mr. Keith Merkey stated he was just sitting in to listen to tonight's meeting and he had no news from Maryland Commission on Civil Rights.

Mr. Hiruy Hadgu, mentioned he is a Howard County resident and immigrant. Mr. Hadgu expressed his concerned and comments to the Howard County 2020 Immigration Report in respect the ICE contract. Mr. Hadgu provided his testimony in writing and they are attached to the February 23, 2021 minutes.

Scott thanked Mr. Hadgu for his comments and asked if the Commissioners had any questions for our guest speaker?

Josh asked has the Coalition published a letter or any communication to Howard County Executive (CEX), County Council or the Office Human Rights and Equity requesting the behavior of the employees at Howard County Corrections facility with regards to the one Mr. Hadgu indicated?

Mr. Hadu responded he wasn't sure if any request had been made. However, there was testimony that was put forth by the CEX. He wasn't made aware if a letter or private discussion was had but the finding is the conduct of the County, we need action items on what can be done to rectify these abuses.

Lynda mentioned she had no questions but a comment for Mr. Hadgu. Lynda stated when the Immigration Report was constructed and sent to CEX and CC and letter was sent along with the

report. In the letter it was clear that they expected that all the detainees and undocumented immigrants are to be treated with respect, dignity regarding procedure and law. Lynda stated she wasn't sure if Mr. Hadgu was aware the letter and what HRC expectations were.

Mr. Hadgu thanked Commissioner Earle and stated he had no doubt that the members of the commission want individuals in the detention center to be treated well. Unfortunately, there needs to be an accountability structure. He mentioned that an investigation would bring that type of structure.

Scott thanked Mr. Hadgu for attending the meeting and sharing his views. Scott mentioned it is good to know that the public is reading what's being written and the public is responding.

Mr. Hadgu asked if the commission accepts written communication, so he could express all his concerns in details. Scott responded, yes and provided Mr. Hadgu with the HRC@howardcountymd.gov email address.

II. APPROVAL OF DECEMBER 17, 2020 AND JANUARY 21, 2021 MINUTES

Josh made a motion to approve the December 17, 2020 minute, and Kui seconded the motion. All Commissioners in attendance voted in favor of accepting the December 17, 2020 minutes, as distributed. The December 17, 2020 minutes were approved.

Bob made a motion to approve the January 21, 2021 minutes, and Joan seconded the motion, with one correction on Elijah Cummings last name spelled incorrectly. All Commissioners in attendance, except Kui, voted in favor of accepting the January 21, 2021 minutes, as distributed. Kui abstained since she was not in attendance at the January 21, 2021 meeting due to a family emergency. The January 21, 2021 minutes were approved.

III. CHAIR'S REPORT – SCOTT

Scott discussed the below items.

Retreat:

He thanked all the Commissioners, Yolanda and Denise Boston for a great retreat, especially with it being virtual this year. Scott mentioned he thinks it would be a nice idea to send Dr. Boston a thank you letter for facilitating the retreat. Scott asked, although Josh is the Correspondence Secretary, would anyone want to volunteer to draft the letter? Lynda volunteered to draft the letter. Scott thanked Lynda for volunteering.

Committee Assignments:

Scott mentioned the past few weeks the Commission established the committees for 2021 based on the goals that were set at the retreat. We will continue to have 4 Standing Committees and we established 3 new Ad HOC Committees.

- Standing (3 commissioners each): Outreach, Awards, Nominating, Legislation
- Ad Hoc (4 commissioners each): Social and Economic Justice, Hate Crimes and Criminal Justice, Immigration

Standing Committees

Outreach: Kui, Leslie and Mabrooka

Awards: Bianca, Gab, Lynda
Nominating: Bob, Joan, Peter
Legislation: Jonathon, Josh, Scott

Ad Hoc Committees

Social and Economic Justice: Bianca, Josh, Kui, Scott
Hate Crimes and Criminal Justice: Gab, Jonathan, Lynda, Mabrooka
Immigration: Bob, Joan, Leslie, Peter

Scott thanked the commissioners for replying to the Google committee survey. He mentioned he gave all commissioners their first or second choice for their preferred committee assignments. He noted if you want to trade places with another commissioner, please contact him directly. He reminded the committees that, in advance of the Commission's March meeting, please hold a meeting, select a chair of the committee, and decide your goals for the year.

Mabrooka asked, when setting a committee meeting, should we go through Chaunta to schedule WebEx meetings, or should we use a different platform? Scott, stated since committee meetings aren't considered public meetings you can do it either way, contact Chaunta or use your own platform.

Immigration Report:

Scott mentioned that cover letters to the CEX, the County Council Members (CC), and the Coalition on Immigrant Justice had not been sent as of the February meeting, since they were still in draft form. Last week the letters that were drafted in December were distributed to CEX, CC and the Coalition.

Scott posed the question to the commissions, should we post the letters on the Human Rights Commission website?

Scott asked the commissioners if they had a preference or not?

- Bianca stated she had no preference,
- Bob suggested the letter should be put on the same tab as the Immigration report.
- Joan agreed with Bob it should be posted with the report.
- Josh stated the letter should be posted on the same link as the report.
- Kui, agreed with Josh, post the letter and as a package.
- Mabrooka stated she also agreed the letter should be posted as a package.
- Gab agreed it should be posted but had no preference separate or together with the report.
- Jonathon recommend posting the letter
- Lynda agreed with everyone that it should be posted along with the package
- Peter had no opinion on whether the letter should be posted, but cautioned that if we post the letter, perhaps we should post all letters

Lynda, commented, asking for clarification if Peter was suggesting all letters or just letters that come with a report? Peter responded if we publish a letter we need to decide on what letters will be published. We do not want it to seem as if we are selectively publishing letter. Scott stated in his opinion we should at the least post the CEX and CC letter. As far as posting all letters that could be addressed at another time and if someone wanted to make a motion we could do that as well. Scott asked if any wanted to make a motion or had any comments.

Chaunta commented, if we decide to post the letter with the report the link will be removed from the site and then reuploaded. As we all aware the Immigration Report and fairly a large package and that would take time. It would be easier to add a link to the letter over top of the link to the Immigration Report link. However, she can do it either way, whichever way the commission decides.

Josh noted that below link Immigration link is the statement regarding the February Crime letter. If the commission chose to post letters there will be a running list of links on the page. Joan suggested for now she would suggest the 2nd option Chaunta stated, having the link over the report. Scott asked if anyone wanted to make a Motion?

Joan made a motion to post the CEX and CC letters as a link above the Immigration report on the HRC website. Bob 2nd the motion, and the Commissioners unanimously agreed.

Vandalism of Asian Business:

Scott mentioned at the beginning of Lunar New Year, four Asian businesses in Howard County were vandalized. The police are investigating whether this may be a targeted hate crime. The County Executive (CEX) and the Office of Human Rights and Equity (OHRE) put out statements condemning the acts.

He thanked Josh, Kui and Joan for working on a statement on behalf of the Human Rights Commission (HRC). Chaunta posted the statement on the HRC website, and asked Marla to post it on OHRE social media accounts.

Scott mention the letter was approved as a statement not as a letter to the editor of the newspaper. It could be turned into that without much effort if someone felt strongly about sending it to the editor. It could be done upon a motion. No motion was made.

Bob commented that he realized it is kind of clunky to name all the protected groups in Howard County in the letter. However, “gender identity” doesn’t represent the entire LGBTQ community; gender identity relates only to the trans community. The gay and lesbian community prefers the term “sexual orientation.” Josh apologized for this oversight. Bob asked that it be noted for future reference.

Black History Month:

Scott mentioned there are lots of events online throughout the community, please be sure to keep track of what you attend and forward to the Outreach Committee, which is currently Kui, Leslie and Mabrooka.

Scott mentioned there is a Black Expo event today and tomorrow if your schedule permits please attend. We need a volunteer to speak on behalf of HRC at the Black Excellence Expo on Thursday, at 4pm. Scott asked Chaunta if should could give more background information on the event.

Chaunta mentioned that Marla Moore is the contact at OHRE for Black History month events. Marla is asking for a commissioner volunteer to talk about who is HRC and their duties. Marla also asked if HRC has a power point, Chaunta mentioned it’s a 1-page presentation however she’s willing to meet with the Outreach committee to create a better version.

Bianca suggested we have a designated person to speak with a prepared Power Point presentation and asked if OHRE need to approve HRC presentation materials. Chaunta stated, no OHRE doesn't need to approve HRC presentation slides.

Chaunta suggested using the one slide for the upcoming event. Bianca suggested adding the Mission, Vision, Purpose, and highlight the committees. Scott stated if Chaunta, Kui and Bianca can put together the presentation then he and Kui will attend the event. Scott asked Chaunta to send him and Kui the event link.

Commissioner Reappointment:

Scott asked whether the commission's vote to recommend reappointment of Peter and Joan been sent to CEX and whether the student commissioner listing been posted? Chaunta responded yes, reappointment was sent, and she will be scheduling a meeting with the Nominating committee to discuss the student commissioner position.

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY REPORT

Yolanda was absent, the Secretary report will be provided by email.

Scott asked Chaunta if she had anything to share in Yolanda's absence.

Chaunta mentioned that there weren't any HBI's to report for the month of February.

Scott asked was the vandalism on the Asians classified as HBI's, Chaunta responded, no not at this time.

IV. STUDENT REPORT

Jonathan mentioned that on February 5th he testified in reference to the House Bill 629, which seeks to remove student voting right to the Howard County Board of Education. On February 12th he testified to the same committee on House Bill 753, which is the student's demonstration bill. Hearing from the committee, it is most likely to get a favorable report. Jonathon recently reached out to Josh on assistance with writing the letter to HCPSS on getting specific data on the HBI's. The purpose is to get description on incidents and what steps did the school take to resolve them. Jonathan mentioned he requested another MPIO to gain knowledge on how HCPSS is being trained and the protocol on HBI's. Lastly, he mentioned he attended a HCPSS Diversity, Equity, Inclusion meeting, where they discussed focusing diversity and inclusion in the school system. They also discussed learning a diverse curriculum, addressing bias, student wellness and mental health and how to advocate to make sure these things are in place.

Mabrooka asked how the testimony opposing blocking students from voting was received?

Jonathon responded that the committee gave an unfavorable report to the bill which is what he advocated for. Therefore, it appears they liked the feedback that was given, they were very receptive to his testimony.

Mabrooka responded that at the Teacher's Union meeting they took a vote to support their students. 174 Members agreed that the students should have a right to vote. Mabrooka stated she would provide her information if needed for Jonathon to make his case. Mabrooka also stated she is available if they need any assistance with writing the letter to HCPSS.

V. COMMITTEE REPORTS

a. Nominating:

Peter nothing to report. Other than the new members will get together to vote a chair and come up with procedures. Once the Student Commissioner Press release goes out they will coordinate interviews.

b. Awards:

Bianca mentioned new members will meet to discuss a Chair and renaming the HRC Awards.

c. Outreach:

Mabrooka discussed the written report

d. Civic Participation (Census/Voting):

Kui, nothing to report

e. Hate Crimes: Josh, nothing to report

Lynda mentioned she spoke with Officer Dieu about the burglary of the Asian businesses on the Lunar New Year. Officer Dieu stated they are looking to be commercial burglary, but they are keeping their eyes open. She believes the Asian business may be being targeted because the owners don't trust banks and keep a lot of cash on hand. She is working with the Asian communities and Officer Dieu on a presentation on how to keep your business safe. Kui mentioned Officer Dieu and Lynda Earle will be conducting a presentation with the Asian community on March 19, 2021.

f. Legislation:

Scott summarized the written report

g. Immigration:

Joan nothing to report, they will meet and restructure

VI. NEW BUSINESS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chaunta mentioned she will be out on leave, having surgery until next Tuesday.

Scott mentioned one of the award recipients from last fall (Erika Strauss Chavarria) with Howard County Community Care. Scott shared his daughter is 12 years of age and started volunteering with the organization in the Spring. Scott mentioned how amazing it is that Erika has built this organization from nothing to what it is today and acknowledged how her award was well deserved.

VII. CLOSED SESSION

Closed session was called to discuss the reconsideration hearing in HRC Case No. 20-11-009. Josh made a motion and Joan 2nd the motion to go into closed session. All commissioners in attendance unanimously agreed to go into closed session. No action was taken during the closed session.

VIII. ADJOURNMENT

- Motion to adjourn the meeting made by Bob and 2nd by Joan. All Commissioners voted in favor meeting adjourned.
- Meeting Adjourned at 8:18 pm.